# PLAIN PROOFS
OF THE
# GREAT FACTS
OF
# CHRISTIANITY.

REV. F. R. WYNNE.

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# PLAIN PROOFS.

Christianity. Evidences

# PLAIN PROOFS

OF THE

# *GREAT FACTS OF CHRISTIANITY.*

FOR THE HELP OF MINDS PERPLEXED WITH DIFFICULTIES.


REV. F. R. WYNNE, M.A.,

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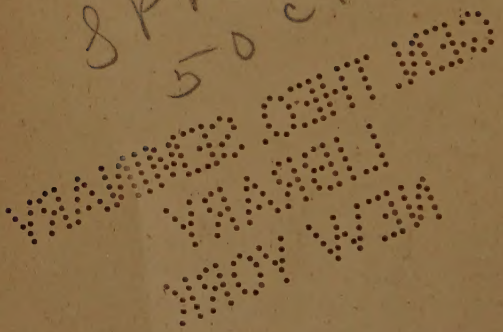

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# PREFACE.

SO many excellent books have been written on "the Evidences," that it might seem needless to issue another. But numerous as are the defences of the Christian creed, more numerous still are the minds perplexed about it and doubting of it. And minds are so differently constituted, that one way of putting an idea will help, when another and it may be a stronger way of putting the same, has failed in helping.

None of the arguments in this little book are new. If they were, they would probably be unsound. It is not likely

that any true grounds for belief have been unknown and unnoticed by fifty generations of believers. I have only put together materials which lie within every one's reach, in the order and the form which long experience with the controversy has made me feel to be the most convenient and the most forcible.

The "Plain Proofs" are printed as they were delivered last Lent,—in a course of Six Lectures to a large and mixed congregation. Thoughtful readers will appreciate the difficulties of putting the arguments so as to be comprehensible to the general public, and at the same time suggestive to the studious and the cultivated. They will, I trust, attribute some of the defects of the following Lectures to this cause, rather than to want of care, study,

and honest thought on the part of the author.

The compression which the limits of a definite course made necessary has its advantages. But it has the disadvantage of excluding some important subjects which could not be adequately discussed within the requisite bounds. Chief among these is the very interesting but very difficult subject of "Prophecy." To handle it so as to be of any use to inquiring minds would have demanded more space than could be afforded. I have preferred to omit it than to spoil it by dealing with so large and deep a subject in a superficial manner.

Among many modern books which I have found most helpful, both in the preparation of these Lectures and in private

conversation with the anxious and the perplexed, I wish specially to mention the following—viz., "The Jesus of the Evangelists," and "Bampton Lectures for 1877," by Prebendary Row; Professor Westcott's "Canon of the New Testament;" "The Gospels in the Second Century," by Rev. W. Sanday; "Christianity and Morality," by Professor Wace.

I gratefully acknowledge my obligations to the authors of these books, and venture to recommend the careful study of them to such of my readers as would wish to examine in detail the arguments briefly summarized here.

F. R. W.

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# LECTURE I

## The Great Question.

# LECTURE I.

## *THE GREAT QUESTION.*

"There is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."—ACTS iv. 12.

IS this name the name of a real Person? Is this Person really able to save? Will the promises that come to us from Him have a real fulfilment?

Such are the questions I want to answer in the following course of lectures. I believe it to be an actual historical fact that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I wish to show that this belief is a reasonable belief—that it is not a blind clinging to pious prejudices, but a per-

suasion grounded on strong and sufficient evidence.

There is, indeed, a childlike faith that rests upon the love and power of the Lord Jesus with something of the same instinctive trust as that with which "the babe sucks surely in the dark." Doubtless in the highest kind of faith there is much akin to this—much that might be described as an attitude of the moral nature rather than an act of the intellectual nature. I earnestly hope that the necessarily hard and dry arguments I shall be obliged to use may not pain or "offend the little ones" who believe with such simple, happy trust.

But in the rough work of life there are many who have not been able to retain the old confidence. It has faded, with

other sweet dreams of childhood. The irrepressible "Why?" of the man's inquiring mind has insisted on making itself heard. Difficulties and perplexities are felt by the active thinker where all used to seem plain and easy to the passive receiver. Doubts or half-doubts have broken up the calm of the heart's quiet convictions. And he who has to live his man's life and to fight his man's battles comes to require the man's understanding of that faith which is to rule his will and influence his every act.

It is to meet such requirement that I ask you to follow with me, for a little while, a more difficult and complicated train of thought than we usually go over together in this place. And let me say to those among my hearers who come to find

help against doubt, that there are few of the forms which doubt has assumed, few of the lines on which it has run, which are not in a greater or less degree familiar to your lecturer's thoughts, and whose force he has not felt at some time quivering in his own heart.

I begin by stating plainly the first position I want to establish. It is simply that the story we have in the Gospels is in the main a true story. An important question has to be asked as to the nature of the writings in which the story is embodied. But that is not our present question. We must confine ourselves at first to the fundamental inquiry, Is the Gospel account of Christ's life, teaching, death, and resurrection, an authentic record of facts which actually happened? It saves us from a

great deal of complication to keep this issue distinctly before us. We have nothing to say (for the present) to the *inspiration of Scripture.* That will be a matter for after consideration. We first take the writings of the New Testament as any other ancient documents. We consider in a critical spirit what evidence there is as to the date of their composition, their authorship, or the sources from which they are drawn. We consider in the same spirit their style, their contents, their agreements and disagreements with each other. We weigh these matters carefully, in order to see what data they afford for our historical inquiry. We must come to our conclusion as to the truth or falsehood of the Christian story of facts before there is any use in going to the further inquiry as to the Divine

authority of the Christian Books. Our business at first is with their truth, not with their authority.

I dwell upon this point not only for the sake of logical precision, but also for the relief of anxious minds. Many people are painfully harassed with doubting questions. And they think they are questions that affect the whole ground of their eternal hopes. When you come to analyse their difficulties, you often find that they do not really bear on the foundation of the Christian faith at all, but on a subject which, though closely connected with it, is essentially distinct from it.

Questions as to the harmony between Scripture and science,—as to the creation, the fall, the deluge, the feeding of the Israelites, the slaughter of the Amalekites,

the conquest of Canaan, etc.,—how often do questions like these shake men's faith and interfere with their peace? And they are certainly very grave questions, to be considered in a very careful and reverent spirit, as bearing on a very important and sacred subject. But that subject is not the truth of Christianity. It is an entirely different subject—namely, the nature and extent of the Divine guidance given to the writers of the Holy Scriptures.

I hope before long to show you the strong reasons we have for looking on the writings both of the Old and New Testament as "given by inspiration of God." But I want you first to see very clearly that the evidence we have for the reality of the Christian story in no degree rests upon the inspiration of Scripture.

It is strange how confused are the ideas of many well-educated people on this point. If asked "Why do you believe Christianity to be true?" they will say, "Because it is in the Bible, and the Bible is inspired." This is an inversion or turning upside down of the grounds of our faith. The real state of the case is not, "We believe Christianity to be true because the Bible is inspired," but "We believe the Bible to be inspired because Christianity is true." We find, from a careful consideration of various classes of facts, that Jesus Christ did really live, work miracles, die, and rise again, and that He is a Divine Person. Knowing this, believing this, we see reasons (which I hope to bring before you by-and-by) to recognize in the Scriptures an authority

from Him. We see it as a second step; but we must stand firmly on the first step before we can rise to the second.

If any of you, then, are perplexed by some of the questions I have alluded to, I would ask you to leave them aside for the present. We have one definite issue now before us, and that issue is not affected by your questions. We want to see whether it is a fact that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. I contend that we have convincing proof that He did, and that the story of His life now current among us is a true story. The evidence that convinces me is just the same, whether I can reconcile Genesis and geology or not. It is just the same, whether the Pentateuch was written by one hand or by several. It is not at all

affected by my opinions about Joshua or Agag or Balaam or Jonah.

I remember the time when I used to tremble at questions like yours. I felt that if I could not see my way through them, I must lose all my hope in Christ. Now I perceive that this agony of fear, which would have made me either a blind bigot or a rash sceptic, arose from a mental confusion. I mixed up in my thoughts, as one, two different subjects—the truth of the Christian history, and the nature of its Record. I weakened the arguments for both by not recognizing their distinctness. I have learned, as all who study the matter carefully must learn, that the evidence for the great facts of Christianity is unaffected by difficulties as to this or that expression in the Bible. I feel it to be

a duty to grapple with such difficulties in a reverent, earnest, and candid spirit; but I can do so now without nervous apprehension. For I know that whatever theory or whatever interpretation stands or falls, "Jesus and the Resurrection" cannot be shaken. The Rock of Ages stands unmoved amidst the varying currents and angry conflicts of Biblical criticism.

I say then again to you, my brother, perplexed by difficulties in the Scriptures,—grave as these are, they need not interfere with your faith in Jesus. Come and see with us what weighty reasons make us believe in His glorious history, even while we are only looking on the records of it as genuine ancient documents. We shall try to go further into the fair promised land afterwards; but first let us go out

of the sea of doubt, and plant our footsteps on the firm ground of solid fact.

Well does old Baxter, in his "Saints' Everlasting Rest," express the important distinction I have been trying to explain.

"Though all Scripture," he says, "be of Divine authority, yet he that believeth but some one book which containeth the substance of the doctrine of salvation may be saved. . . . They that take the Scripture to be but the writings of godly honest men, and so to be only a means of making known Christ, . . . . and do believe in Christ upon those strong grounds which are drawn from His doctrine, miracles, etc., rather than upon the testimony of the writing, as being purely infallible and Divine, may yet have a Divine and saving faith."—(Part II., chap. iii.)

I wish it to be understood further, that in the argument of these Lectures I do not start, as is often done, by assuming, or trying to prove on abstract principles, the existence of God. Apologists generally begin their reasoning thus: there is a God, therefore miracles are possible; there is a God, therefore a revelation is probable; this being settled, listen to our arguments for these particular miracles and this particular revelation. I leave such theories aside altogether. The existence of a Personal God is with many minds *the great difficulty*. If they were sure there was an Unseen Being outside themselves—a Father, a God—it would be easy to believe anything further. But this is just what they cannot assure themselves of. The hints of nature, the yearnings of their hearts, the

universal traditions of mankind, fail to set their minds at rest. Laws do not seem to them necessarily to involve a law-giver. Poor craving hearts, they fear, are often destined to yearn and crave in vain. Old tales and traditions and common mythologies tell of what men imagine and wish for rather than what they have reason to know.

It is to minds who are thus doubting and questioning that I principally address myself now. Is there anything real existing outside the ken of my bodily senses? Is there a Father above me? Is there a future before me?

Nature, says the puzzled inquirer, gives no answer but silence,—a terrible silence sometimes, as her relentless laws crush us under their wheels and doom us to sorrow

and death. The history of humanity gives no answer but a confused and perplexing riddle. The heart gives no answer but a sigh of weariness or a groan of despair. Is there no answer? I answer you, my brother, with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. I do not trouble you with theories or counter theories; I answer you with a series of facts. I prove to you that certain events actually happened; I prove to you that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, that He produced effects in the world of matter and in the world of mind that no natural cause could produce. I ask you for no antecedent doctrines. I press upon you the one simple question, Did these things really happen, or did they not? Is that story of facts a true story? If you can decidedly answer Yes, it is enough.

Your doubtings and wonderings may be at an end. God has been manifested among us; He has revealed Himself to us in Christ Jesus. The dark enigma of Destiny He has solved; the questions on which hang the issues of life and death He has answered.

Have we a Father in Heaven to whom we can cry in our despair? Have we a Helper above us when all the helps around us fail? Can we hope that our beloved ones are not lost, but gone before? Is there any meaning in our deep yearnings for good, our remorse and self-reproach for evil? Are our aspirations for a hereafter, our hopes for something better and more satisfying than earth affords, to have a fulfilment?

Yes! we answer unhesitatingly,—yes, for Jesus has come into the world. Yes! for He has been declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. Yes! for His life, His teaching, His miracles, are a revelation to us of the Eternal God.

We confine ourselves, then, for the present to this one point—the historical truth of the Gospel story. And in the argument I bring before you I shall understate, rather than overstate, the premises from which we reason. I shall put before you facts, not as they appear to me or as they appear to believers in Christianity, but as they are generally acknowledged to be by candid opponents.

I shall argue on the premises they admit, but not with the kind of arguments

they sometimes require. "We must be prepared," says Mr. M. Arnold, "to verify our assertions by plain experimental proofs such as that fire burns." Plain proofs we have, but experimental proofs of matters concerning morals and history are impossible. Here is a mistake constantly made by unbelievers. We *must* have this or that kind of evidence. Is it not an absurdity to lay down this "must"? There are certain data before us. They are very numerous and of very different kinds. Some appeal to the intellect, some to the conscience. To the sight and touch though they once appealed, they can from the nature of the case appeal no longer. But they seem to us very convincing, very overwhelming. Their force is not to us the least diminished because they are

not other kinds of proofs. It is nothing to me what sort of evidence you may choose to call it. It is nothing to me that it is not the same kind of evidence as that which makes me know "fire burns." It is everything to me whether it is sufficient or insufficient; that is the only thing I care to consider.

And that we have in this vital matter.

I will show you, I trust, that the facts connected with Christianity acknowledged even by unbelievers, put together before the understanding and conscience, are sufficient to make us know as a certainty that Jesus Christ was a real Person; that He taught with superhuman wisdom and wrought with superhuman power; that He was dead and is alive again; and that the promises, made in His name, of forgiveness

of sin, renewal of heart, and eternal life, are real blessings, which all who faithfully and humbly seek through Him will surely find.

# LECTURE II.

## The Great Power.

## LECTURE II.

### *THE GREAT POWER.*

"But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."—1 Cor. i. 24.

IT is certain that there existed no such thing as the Christian religion in the year of our era 30. It is certain that a very wide spread Christian religion existed in the year 64. The heathen historian Tacitus describes in graphic language the vast numbers of "this pernicious superstition," as he calls it, who were put to death with horrible cruelty

at about that date by the Emperor Nero in Rome.*

Letters written by a man named Paul, admitted by unbelievers as well as believers to be genuine documents, dating from about ten years previous, show the same thing, and show that the Christian religion spread abroad so widely then was substantially the same as the Christian religion we believe in now.

Whatever may have been the *cause*, it is certain, therefore, that within those few years from A.D. 30 to A.D. 50 a RESULT was produced which we call Christianity. We can see to-day what the result is. It remains among us. We can be as sure of its leading characteristics as that "fire burns." We shall consider the result

* Tacitus, *Ann.*, l. xv., c. 44.

in this lecture, in order to help us in our investigations as to its cause.

And first we find that, from the darkness of that brief period in the dim far away past, there has issued A GREAT POWER whose work we know, whose force we feel. It is certainly a wonderful power for good,—a power which has given to the moral principle within us both clearness and intensity.

One of the earliest records of the nature and spread of Christianity which we have from a heathen pen takes notice of this force.

Pliny, the governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, writing to the Emperor Trajan in the beginning of the second century, tells him of the vast number of Christians there were in his district, and asks his directions as to the course of conduct he should pur-

sue towards them. From the confessions of those who had been accused and had recanted, he gathers the following description of their practice: "they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and to sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as a god, and bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft or robbery or adultery, never to falsify their word nor to deny a pledge committed to them when called upon to return it."* Thus even heathen accounts, extorted from renegades by fear of death and torture, show us from the first Christianity as a force making for righteousness.

* C. Plinius, *Trajano Imp. S.*, lib. x., cp. xcvii.; Lardner's translation, vii. 22.

1. Very remarkable is the clearness with which the religion of Jesus of Nazareth has always pressed upon man the difference between right and wrong. It brought into prominence a large class of virtues and graces whose obligations had not been felt before, and whose beauty had hardly been recognised.

Meekness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance, may have adorned individual lives in all times; but with Christianity they first stood out before the world as noble objects to aim at. Neither Greek nor Roman heroes, nor oriental devotees, were ever painted as meek and lowly in heart. Such painting would have had no beauty in the eyes of beholders.

The sacredness of truth, too, the obligation of witnessing to inward convictions

even unto death, came to be recognised as a holy duty with the new force we are considering. Many causes have had their martyrs, but the first martyrs for *truth* were disciples of Jesus.

"One lesson," writes the thoughtful author of "The Restoration of Belief," "which remained to be brought out and to be wrought into the hearts of men, was the Religious obligation of Belief. . . Until this generative principle should be worked out as an axiom in morals, nothing could be hoped for as to the destinies of the human family. Have we sufficiently regarded the fact that this great problem was solved for us by the martyr church of the century and a half in prospect?" *

So clear has been the Christian code

* "Restoration of Belief," p. 75.

of morals, that the keenest and most far-seeing thinkers, even of modern times, have acknowledged every duty enforced by it as in the long run conducive of "the greatest happiness to the greatest numbers," and have been able to suggest no principle of right which is not contained or involved in it. An ideal of goodness was held up for men's admiration and imitation by the first preachers of the gospel: the widest reaching modern speculations have recognised its perfection; its moral standard has never been improved upon.

2. This code so clear, this ideal so beautiful, has spread its influence over all kinds of people, of all nations and races, of all degrees of barbarism or education. Like that pale messenger whose terrors it

has so much diminished, the moral power of Christ's religion makes its presence felt impartially in the palaces of princes and in the huts of the poor. While philosophers are wearying themselves to find a satisfactory basis of morals, while every theory they lay down still leaves the imperative "*I ought*" among the unexplained mysteries of mind, the Christian child finds its clear code and its intelligible basis of morals in the simple yet deeply searching questions, "What would Jesus do? What would Jesus wish?"

3. The *intensity* of the power is as remarkable as its clearness. It not only lays down the lines on which noble life should run, but supplies the motive impulse. It makes man say not only "I ought" but "I *will*." It has found out the secret of

acting on his complex nature, appealing at the same time to his affections and to his judgment, and rousing wherever it has its legitimate sway a deep *enthusiasm for goodness* which no obstacles can conquer.

4. And not only have we here a *guiding* moral power and an *urgent* moral power, but we have also in a very special way a *remedial* power. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost:" so says one of the early Christian records; and in accordance with this statement has been the influence of the Christian power ever since. Where prudence has no voice, where punishment only hardens, where all ordinary motives fail to touch the cold dull conscience, there the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ comes in as the only helper. How many degraded and ruined ones

have there been, during the eighteen centuries since Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, who have lifted up their heads from their despair and have roused their wills from sullen torpor, when they have been led to hear the voice of that crucified One saying, "Come unto Me"! This is a leading feature of Christianity—prominent now—prominent from the first. It is beautifully pictured in a story attributed by the early Christians to their Founder, in which an alien in race and religion and a foe in politics is described as finding a wounded man by the road side, binding up his wounds and carrying him into safety and comfort. Help to the fallen, the degraded, the miserable, has always been the special work of Christianity. Other systems have suggested means of

strengthening habits of good and further elevating the *élite* of the earth. Believers in Jesus Christ have considered themselves bound to go among the "highways and hedges" and bring in to the holy festival the halt, the lame, and the blind. *Remedy* —remedy of moral evil and physical suffering—is the peculiar mission of Christianity.

5. Is it necessary for me to speak of the power of *consolation* it has carried with it? The name of "gospel"—"good news" —expresses its best known and most constantly exercised work. The old books I have referred to describe the man Jesus as anointed to "bind up the broken in heart." And amidst the sorrows of humanity His religion goes forth as the great Consoler. It comforts where every other attempt at comfort seems only a

mockery. Long, weary, hopeless pain racks the body; the poor languid eyes still brighten at the thought of Jesus. Friends dearer than life are taken away, hopes are disappointed, affections are blighted, dark shadows seem to blot out all the joys of life; yet the believer in Jesus lives on, not only submitting, but peaceful and hopeful, "rejoicing in tribulation." The dews of death stand upon the forehead, voices of the nearest and dearest sound strange and far away to the "dying ears," and to the "dying eyes" all earthly objects grow dim; yet still the smile flickers over the worn face when one Name is whispered, and the white lips murmur "Amen" to the prayer breathed up to Heaven through Him to whom that Name belongs.

In speaking thus I am not drawing upon imagination. Who is there among us who has passed middle life that cannot testify to having personally seen the suffering soothed, the sorrowing comforted, the dying strengthened, by the religion of Jesus of Nazareth?

6. The power we are speaking of is chiefly an inward power, pressing on hearts and consciences; but it has manifested itself in a great outward and visible organization which we call the Church of Christ. In spite of divisions and mutual recriminations, we know that there is now spread through the world, and has been since the time of those letters I referred to—about the year 60,—a vast, widely-branching society, bound together by faith in one Person, aspiration after one kind of

life, and hope of one destiny. I do not speak of how far it has reached its aspirations, or how far it has acted consistently with its creed. We all know how miserable have been its failures, how humiliating its terrible inconsistencies; but there it is, still visible before us—there it has been for centuries—gradually spreading, reaching into further and further domains, — gathering in new races of humanity under its influence. The Christian Church, with its various branches, its sacraments, its doctrines, its laws, its ministry, lives, speaks, works, in our midst. We must take it in as a palpable, tangible part of the great result we are trying to estimate.

7. In thinking of the power that has had such sway since the death of Jesus Christ, we must not forget that it has had

to make its way against the most tremendous opposition. Though cherished with passionate devotion by its friends, it has been scorned and hated by its enemies. The Jews detested it with fanatical ferocity as the disappointment of their national aspirations and the foe and rival of their national creed. (The story of their bigoted opposition which we read in the earliest Christian books is only what, from the nature of the case, we might be sure would have occurred.) The heathens scorned the new faith as a Jewish superstition, and disliked it as an uncompromising antagonist of the religious systems that were looked upon by the upper classes as pleasant and convenient, and by the lower as protecting them from the wrath of the gods. So from all sides the rising

power was challenged. It was met by the arguments of the learned, by hatred and sometimes by bloody persecution from the people. The first part of a prophecy attributed to the great Founder has had its fulfilment as certainly as the last: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer—I have overcome the world."

8. One more remark before we put together all that we have seen about the moral and spiritual power which has emerged from the cross and grave of Jesus. Such as it is now, such it was from the first. It has not been a mere nucleus round which the culture and experience of humanity have gradually been collected. It has not been the resultant of a number of latent forces in our nature, which as the ages went by

were brought out one by one, and led to unite in drawing in the same direction. It is not, like civilization, a *growth*—a development. It is a power that has come forth upon the world full grown and fully armed from its birth. What of beauty is there in modern Christianity, what of "sweetness and light," what of heroism and self-sacrifice, that cannot be found as beautifully or more beautifully expressed in the letters of Paul, or those old fragmentary histories which we call gospels? Not a life-giving idea is there, not a motive for righteousness known and felt in the Church of the nineteenth century, that was not known and felt in the Church of the first.

Such, then, is the result we have to contemplate. We are not in this depend-

ing on the testimony of others: we can observe it ourselves. We have before our very eyes a living Power, clear in its description of elevated morality, strong in its enforcement of it: a power that for eighteen centuries is acknowledged, by those who do not themselves bow before it, to have done more than any known power in existence to ennoble and ameliorate the human race;* a power which reaches and reforms the most degraded, which helps, cheers and guides the earnest seeker after goodness; a power which has placed truth on the high pedestal it now occupies, which gives courage to the naturally timid, strength to the weak, comfort to the

* I might quote passages agreeing with this statement from such writers as J. S. Mill, or Mr. Lecky, the historian of Rationalism.

sorrowful, hope to the despairing, triumphant joy to the dying; a power which has broken through all the barriers of caste, of nationality, of differing languages, mental and physical organisations, lifelong habits of thought and action, and has brought to bear on all peoples, nations and languages alike the pressure of one holy ideal of life, love and loyalty to one unseen Person, grateful faith in one grand act of self-sacrifice, and confident expectation of one destiny of joy.

This power has been opposed by bloody persecution, yet it has pressed on unchecked. It has been flattered and made much of, and put into false positions by the great ones of the earth, yet it has survived. All things have changed, yet it has not changed. Dynasties have risen

and fallen, popular beliefs have waxed and waned, systems of philosophy have flourished and passed away, superstitions have one by one dropped into disuse and been forgotten, civilization has gradually spread with its mingled blessing and curse; but all this time the Christian power has remained unaltered—the same in the direction of its force and the nature of its force as it was from the beginning; mingling with advancing civilization and helping it, but gaining nothing from it except new opportunities for exercising its primitive qualities. Like the sun, which shines upon the evil and the good, and warms and gladdens each region of the revolving earth, the religion of Jesus has, through these long centuries of chequered human history, blessed and

enlightened all who came within reach of its influence with the shining of its pure ideas of God, of goodness, and of eternity.

How has this power originated? What has been the cause of this result, of which my words have given only a feeble and hasty sketch? We know that a force cannot be in action without receiving its impulse from a force or combination of forces equal to itself. Where is the ulterior force that has put Christianity in motion?

It is certain that its power has issued from the few years before and after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. How could it have originated then? What could have produced in its full strength an engine of such vast moral efficacy? It originated in a conviction about *facts*. A conviction

that a certain man had lived a supernatural life, had wrought supernatural acts, had risen again from the dead, had proved Himself to be a manifestation of God and the Saviour of humanity,—in this conviction the Christian power certainly originated. This persuasion (whether right or wrong) that the man Jesus was more than man, that He had done what man could not do, and shown Himself to be what mere man could not be,—this persuasion was, without any manner of doubt, the foundation of Christianity. Here is the foundation. We have only to ask, Is it a foundation of fact, or a foundation of delusion? Did the things which the first Christians supposed had taken place really take place, or did they not? If they did,

we have a grand cause for a grand effect. It is an adequate cause. There is a correlation between the force we see in action and the force which gave it birth. The effect seems to us beyond all human power; the effect is a signal triumph of good over evil: we should expect the cause to be superhuman too; we should expect it to be a signal exertion of the "power not ourselves which makes for righteousness." So it is if the gospel story is true. So it is if the disciples were right in their idea about facts. The Divine result we see originated in the Divine interposition we believe in.

Only think for a moment of the alternative. What a chaos we should have! The sublime effect originating in dreams or lies! The power which has ever put

devotion to *truth* in the forefront, itself only the offspring of a falsehood! The power which has elevated, comforted, ennobled humanity, the issue of a pious fraud or a pious mistake! We confess ourselves sceptics here. Our credulity cannot accept such a cause as the producer of such an effect.

The utter inadequacy of any conceivable cause but a Divine cause, the impossibility of any mere human or natural agency in existence at the given time to produce the result we are contemplating, must form the subject of future lectures. Meanwhile, I ask you to keep in mind the sublimity and splendour of the "moral miracles" which you see yourselves wrought in the world by Him whom our text calls "Christ the Power of God."

# LECTURE III.

## The Great Figure.

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### *THE GREAT FIGURE.*

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."—JOHN i. 14.

CAREFUL scientific investigation proceeds from the known to the unknown. I wish our investigation into the origin of Christianity to take a like course. I wish to start from facts and phenomena we see and are sure of, and to be led by them to our conclusions on the subjects with regard to which we may have our doubts. From the certain the acknow-

ledged, the visible in the present, I want to draw our arguments as to the obscure and mysterious in the past.

We considered in our last lecture the great moral and spiritual Power that all thoughtful men recognise as linked with Christianity, and as having come upon the stage of the world's long drama with Christianity. That is something known. Closely connected with that great Power we also see a great *Figure*. Emerging from the definite point of time we spoke of, between A.D. 30 and A.D. 50, there has risen up before mankind a personal Picture, towards which men's eyes have turned with admiration ever since.

Whether the *Person* painted be real or ideal, the *picture* at all events is real. Whether you believe little or much, you

know as a matter of fact that you have before your eyes now, and that there has been before the eyes of the Christian Church from the earliest period of which we have any record, the description of the character and life of a man called Jesus. The Figure has come into prominence along with the Power. The idea of the Person portrayed has been the secret of the Power. If Christians see the right distinctly, if they are eager to perform it, if the degraded among them rise up from their sin, if the sorrowful smile amidst their tears, it is all due to one cause—the thought of Jesus. The idea of His presence, His holiness, His love, is the constraining force.

However the idea originated, there it is—as manifest a fact as that the sun

is in the heavens. Some may doubt whether there ever was any reality corresponding with the idea; some may think that the Figure is arrayed in the beautiful but shadowy robes of pious imagination; but whatever they doubt or whatever they may conjecture, they must admit that the idea is a very real factor in human thought.

And the picture of this Person, however drawn, was certainly drawn very early. We have it before us in its beauty on the pages of the four gospels; we have reflexions of it flashing back upon us from all the books of the collection of ancient literature we call the New Testament. There is a great weight of critical evidence leading us to believe that the whole of this literature was produced

during the lifetime of Christ's contemporaries. On the admission even of the most destructive school of unbelievers, it ranges in the dates of the composition of its various documents from about A.D. 65 to A.D. 140. Four of St. Paul's epistles at all events, it is allowed, were written about that earlier date, and the three synoptic gospels before the end of the first century. All the main features of Christ's character are preserved for us in those three gospels, and are alluded to and implied in St. Paul's epistles. We therefore know it as an acknowledged fact that the picture of Jesus, which we are now going to study, was (whether true or false) drawn and held up before men during the lifetime of people who had seen and spoken to the Original.

The fuller and further delineation of it contained in St. John's Gospel was, even on the admission of unbelievers in its Johannine origin, written during the life-time of their children.

Strangely beautiful and touching is that old, yet ever-new picture. As we draw near to look at it, a voice seems to say, "Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground." Reverently, then, but with the firm gaze of honest inquiry, let us try to see what manner of man He was supposed to be who has left such a mark in the world. It is in the record of a life spent in very difficult and trying circumstances that we have to look for the portraiture. A man is described there, admired, courted and

followed by crowds sometimes, hated, scorned and persecuted at other times. He had to pursue His public career under the changing lights and shadows of popular enthusiasm, popular misunderstanding, and popular execration. One day His hearers want to take Him by force and make Him a king, another day they cast stones at Him or cry "Crucify Him, Crucify Him."

A few years only of His life are described, but on that short period there is a blaze of intense light—light like the fierce light that beats on a throne—light of publicity and eager observation; so that the Figure shines down upon us through the ages with vivid clearness.

Jesus going about doing good—Jesus teaching, Jesus rebuking, Jesus working

miracles, Jesus praying, Jesus suffering, Jesus dying, Jesus in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea, on the mountain, on the cross,—is not the picture of it all as fresh as if painted yesterday!

It is, I believe, universally admitted that the character of the man drawn there is the noblest conceivable. It combines the soft graces of womanhood with the strong virtues of manhood. Pity, tenderness, loving affection, are blended with heroic courage, clear-sighted wisdom, unflinching truthfulness, unwavering determination of purpose. Humility and kingly dignity, gentle treatment of sinners and scathing denunciation of sin, softest sympathy and sternest justice, meet in Jesus. Truly a noble man stands before us, beautiful with all the beauty of human

goodness. But something beyond human goodness is there. No ordinary human motive of life seems to stir that sublime Figure; no faintest trace of ambition or self-seeking is to be seen. Self is utterly laid aside. From first to last He comes to do the will of another, to live His life in others' service, to lay down His life for others' benefit.

But a still further element comes in. We have in this picture of a life, not only human goodness and superhuman self-devotion, but something hard to speak of, awful to think of. This man so gentle and humble, so brave, so kindly, so wise, so laborious, yet shows a continual consciousness that He is more than man. Along with his unselfishness and humility, there is a calm but steadfast and un-

varying self-assertion. He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He has "power on earth to forgive sins," He has "come to give His life a ransom for many," He is to "sit on the right hand of Power and come with the clouds of heaven." It is by coming to Him, believing on Him, that men are to have everlasting life.

So is Jesus portrayed: gentle and loving man, yet holy and awful God.

But Divine as He is, He is described as *suffering*. According to our picture, He was one who knew what it was to be grieved, to be angry at hardness of heart, to be troubled in spirit, to weep, to be in agony. Yet calmly and voluntarily He is described as laying down His life. Amidst yelling multitudes, amidst insult of words and buffeting and scourging of

body, He is still self-forgetful, still thinking of others, still giving comfort to sufferers and hope to the penitent, still unmovable in His quiet kingly Majesty.

Am I exaggerating? Do you not feel that I am rather spoiling the picture by my formal words? I feel it myself. Every attempt to describe the life of Jesus is more or less unsatisfying. From the most interestingly written modern accounts we turn with a kind of relief to the "short and simple annals" in the gospels. There is a beauty and nobleness there that all ordinary words fail to express. The picture is in your own hands: take it and look at it.

Now the important question arises, How did this picture come into being? Here it is; here it has been since a few years after the death of Christ, certainly.

How did it originate? We have it in four different frames, but the picture is essentially the same in all. There are four gospels, there are many epistles, there is but *one Jesus:* one and the same grand countenance looks out upon us from every page of the New Testament. How, we ask, was the portrait taken? Is it a *likeness*, or is it a *work of the imagination?* How came the writers of those old books to describe a character whose marvellously combined qualities have been the strength and the consolation of all kinds and classes of people for eighteen centuries? Do you hesitate to allow that it is a likeness? Do you find a difficulty in believing the story to be literally true? If so, you have to grapple with our question,—How

came this picture (which certainly exists) into being?

It is not, you think, a narrative of real events. The Person described did not really act and speak as He is there narrated to have done. The picture is beautiful, but it is, in great part at least, imaginary. How was it, then, put together? How could it have been composed? Try to think this out. Was it invented at once, or was it gradually developed? Can you conceive its having been *invented?* The same beautiful story of life and character invented by several different authors, who evidently wrote without concert or mutual comparison, who diverge considerably in details yet thoroughly agree in the "effect" of the picture,—do you think this possible?

Where could the materials have been found for such an invention? The moral and spiritual ideas expressed in the story are far beyond any standard of thought and feeling known at the time they were written. Good men had risen up in various lands, and had shown many virtues and taught many precious truths mingled with many errors and inconsistencies; but nothing like the union of qualities and teachings that shine forth in the history of Jesus had ever been heard or dreamed of. They have satisfied the spiritual aspirations of the most earnest and cultured thinkers up to the present day. And these Syrian peasants invented them! Educated amidst the fierce bigotry and hard half-views of Divine truth current among the Jews of

the first century, they drew from their inner consciousness that exquisitely harmonious combination of graces which make up the character of Jesus!

They elaborate the most lovely ideal of truth and holiness and self-sacrifice and perfect obedience to the Divine will; and as they do so they are solemnly recording events as having happened a few years ago, which never happened at all. With the most careful description of details, they tell us that Jesus did things He never did and said things He never said! Can you conceive an evangelist sitting down and inventing the interview between Jesus and the centurion, Jesus and Bartimæus, Jesus and the deaf man whom He took aside from the multitude, Jesus and the blind

man whom He took by the hand and led through the city, Jesus and the Canaanitish woman, Jesus by the grave of Lazarus, Jesus with Peter upon the waves? You cannot suppose that the conversations are real and the miraculous stories fabulous; for they are so interwoven one with another, that they stand or fall together. The words either lead up to the works, or start from them and take their occasion from them. Can you conceive all, then, to have been invented? Is it possible to imagine any one putting together such pure and lovely teaching and such gross fabrications?

But if you suppose that the evangelists did not invent, but embodied and pieced in together previous accounts—as to a certain degree Christian critics conclude

that they did—the difficulty is not solved, but only thrown back. How did those previous accounts originate? They must have been nearer still to the time when the things recorded were supposed to have happened. How did *their* inventors manage to put together the noble teaching and the one noble aspect of living with the ignoble fabrication of a thousand things which never took place? The nearer to the time of Jesus, the harder would be such a task.

We have instances in a later age of something of the kind. We have, in what are called the "apocryphal gospels," fictitious accounts of doings and sayings of our Lord, composed either as pious frauds or well-intended works of imagination. These are just what we should

expect from such a source—weak, childish, and superstitious. By their contrast with the simple and beautiful story of the Gospel they show us the impassable chasm there is between a description of facts and an invention of the marvellous for a religious purpose in an uncultured state of society. Must we not feel, then, that it is impossible that our history of Christ's life could have been either wholly or in part deliberately invented?

But might not the account have been gradually developed? Might not the spiritual wants and yearnings of mankind have by degrees embodied themselves in this pretty story? Such is the theory of "myths," and it has been a great favourite with the school of German thinkers, at whose head stands the famous name of

Strauss. But was there time between the death of Jesus, in 33, and the writing of St. Paul's epistles, in 65,—was there time for such a gradual development? The formation of myths takes long periods in dark ages for the ideas talked over by fires of pine-wood to become embodied in songs chanted by rude minstrels or crooned out by dusky mothers over their sleeping babes. Was there time or opportunity for anything of this kind with the story of Jesus? Thirty years of busy strife in which that story was publicly taught, battled over with eager disputants, and died for again and again,—would those thirty stormy years between the time when Jesus suffered and the time when our picture appears in definite history, have been sufficient for the growth of

these wonderfully circumstantial myths? And where was the stupendous genius to put men's aspirations into a form which men's aspirations were never known to have aimed at or dreamed of? The perfect man, the lowly man, the self-sacrificing man, the Divine man, suffering and dying;—not a few years, but the throes of moral and spiritual struggle for centuries would have been needed for the birth of such a myth! I turn back, then, and in answer to the question before us I say, This story, in its beauty and its simplicity, its loftiness of moral range and accuracy of detail and local colouring, could not possibly have been an invention—could not possibly have been a gradual development—could not possibly have been a collection of myths

or legends. One thing only could it have been—an authentic history of facts. The Evangelists had before their minds, as they wrote, a real Person, who lived the life they describe. Those unlettered men, writing in the rather rough dialect peculiar to their age and country (which dialect in itself forms an undesigned but very important landmark of date), simply put down an unvarnished account of facts. Their narratives were plainly and honestly gathered, either from their own memory or from the accounts current among those who had known and lived with Jesus. The beauty of the description does not come from the genius or imagination of the authors. It comes from the actual Person whose words and acts are recorded. The phenomena we

see are thus (and I must say thus only) reasonably explained. The gospel story is sublime because Jesus is sublime. The wonderful combination of graces is woven together with such exquisite harmony in the narrative because it was exhibited in the life of the real Man. There is indeed a wonder of wonders—a splendour of beauty to be knelt before with adoring admiration. But that wonder, that splendour, is not the genius of the composer of a series of exquisite fictions, but the grand majesty of Him to whom our text gives its witness: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." In a word, Christianity is true. Jesus is our Lord and our Redeemer, as well as our ideal of nobility.

# LECTURE IV.

## The Great History.

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### *THE GREAT HISTORY.*

"One Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."—ACTS xxv. 19.

IN the last two lectures we considered the "moral miracles" which have been wrought by the Gospel, and the beauty and unity of that picture which the Evangelists have drawn for us of Jesus. I can conceive some of my hearers saying, 'We admit much of what you advance thus far—almost all of it—and yet we are not the least convinced. You have shown us noble

ideas, you have shown us a holy character. But Christianity is not the only religion which can show these credentials. Many other systems have their exalted thoughts, their pure morality, their holy persons, and sacred books. You are only making the same *kind* of claim upon our homage as other religions. If there is any difference between you and them, it is only a matter of degree.' I seldom take up a rationalistic book or review in which some such half-condescending, half-sneering objection to Christian arguments is not made.

It seems to me that under this specious objection lies a great fallacy. It is a refusal to grapple with the facts and phenomena of Christianity seriously and carefully, from a vague idea that there have been other

phenomena and other facts something like them. Leave, I would say, those other systems alone till you have fairly looked the features of this one in the face. When you have thoroughly mastered its facts, then you may turn and compare it with others. I, for one, am prepared to say that if there is any religion to be found analogous in its great lines to Christianity, whose moral and spiritual ideas have anything like its purity and sublimity, whose history has been marked by such a career of victory over evil, whose motive power has been an ideal of such perfection as Christ's, I shall not frown upon it as a rival, but hail it as an ally to Christianity. The astronomer who shows you the sun does not want to hide or ignore the planets. The

believer in Christ does not claim for Him a monopoly of truth and goodness.

We freely admit that, in spite of man's faults and corruptions, there is in him a "moral sense"—a capacity of approving holy ideas. And God has never left Himself without witnesses. "Broken lights" from Him have flashed through the darkest epochs of human history. We cordially recognise much that is good in the teaching of such men as Confucius, Sakya Mouni, Socrates, and Plato,—much that is noble in the lives of some of them. It would be an easy task to show, in the ideas of them all, a great deal that is unsatisfactory, a great deal that the instructed mind and conscience must reject; a great deal in the lives of the teachers, as far as they have come down

to us, that we should be sorry to take as our model. It would be easy to show that these men and their systems, as compared to the perfect spiritual teaching of Jesus and to the faultless elevation of His character, are but "as moonlight unto sunlight or as water unto wine." But this would be an invidious task, and to my mind unnecessary. I am not endeavouring to prove that Socrates and Plato were not divine, but that Jesus is.

I do not ask you to put aside the study of comparative mythology. It is most interesting in its way—most interesting to see the great wants and cravings of mankind trying to find a voice in strangely varying, yet strangely connected families of fables. But I ask you not to let a vague idea about the

existence of those old mythologies and those various leaders of human thought turn away your mind from the direct, close, careful consideration of the actual facts of Christianity.

And in our present lecture I want to lead you to see that this Person, whose picture at all events is so real and beautiful, and whose power in the world has been so beneficent, has also been connected in men's minds from the first with a *stupendous History*.

How do we know what the History was? The sources from which we draw our knowledge of it are chiefly those four old records called "gospels." I showed you in our last lecture, from internal considerations, how hard it is to conceive the story embodied in them to have been

either consciously invented or gradually developed. I wish now to point out to you some of the external evidence we have for its truth.

Towards the close of the second century, during the life of the grandchildren of Christ's contemporaries, the gospels were freely and constantly quoted by voluminous and well-known Christian writers. They were by that time as much recognised in the Christian Church as the teaching of Christ's apostles as they are now, and were attributed to the writers whose names they now bear. From the way in which they are quoted in some documents of that early date, it appears that their text had even then begun to be modified, corrupted, and altered, so that they must have been long used by

the Church, and frequently copied and recopied. At the end of the second century our gospels were old, honoured, and frequently transcribed books.

Going back a little further to the *middle* of the second century, from A.D. 140 to 150, we find two great writers who had probably been born before the end of the first century. One of them, Papias, mentions Matthew's and Mark's gospels by name, and gives information as to their composition.* The other, Justin Martyr, who

* It would not be candid to ignore the doubt felt by some careful critics as to the identity of the Matthew and Mark referred to by Papias with our gospels. The improbability of their being different seems to me very great. But whatever divergence of opinion there may be on this point, it will hardly be doubted that the gospels alluded to by Papias, and called by the same names as ours certainly bore a generation afterwards, could not have been in any essential matters different from them in teaching and narrative.

died for Christianity A.D. 148, makes a vast number of quotations from our gospels, or from documents identical with them in substance. In four hundred such passages there are only four that diverge in any noticeable way from our gospels as they stand.

Seeking back further still, we come to the time immediately after the life of the apostles. There, dating from the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, we have the writings of several Christian teachers—writings so much prized that they used to be read aloud in the assemblies. The testimony of these "apostolic fathers," as they are called, men who had known and spoken to the apostles, is exceedingly valuable. They do not mention our gospels by

name; but they use expressions almost identical with passages contained in them; and (what is of greater importance) all the facts they believe in as to our Lord, all the doctrines they hold and promulgate, are precisely the same as those contained in our gospels. It is certain, then, that our gospels (no matter when or by whom written) embody the same story and the same teaching as that which was current in the Christian Church at the end of the first century, within the lifetime of men who had seen Christ.

We can go back further than this. We have the letters of St. Paul, four of which (as I mentioned on a previous occasion), viz., Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, are allowed by the most

destructive critics to be genuine. They are as thoroughly recognised to be the real writings of the real Paul, as Shakespeare's plays or Spenser's poems to be the works of the men whose names they bear. The exact date of these letters can only be approximately calculated. They range from about 55 to 65. Paul's death took place about 68. The teaching of the letters is, you know well, in its main lines identical with that of the gospels. The faith so vividly expressed by Paul rests on the foundation of fact described by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The beautiful character of Christ, His supernatural origin, His teaching, His death on the cross, His resurrection and ascension,—these ideas manifestly permeate the mind of the writer of the

epistles. Thus from the present day reaching back till twenty years after the death of Jesus, we have a chain of Christian writers by whom one and the same great history is borne witness to. And that history is identical with the account in our gospels.

Very early indeed in the career of the Church, even before the end of the first century, there began to be disputes among Christians on various points of doctrine. Traces of such we find in the epistles and in the Apocalypse. They rapidly developed into what are called "heresies" in the second century. Several unbelieving authors also (Jew and heathen) attacked Christianity shortly after its birth. We have fragments of their writings preserved to this day.

Now, amidst all these arguments between Christians and Jews, Christians and heathens, Christians and their fellow-Christians, one story of fact is recognised as the object to be attacked and defended, and as the storehouse from which all arguments, both friendly and hostile, are to be drawn. That story is substantially the story of our gospels.

But it is not only by individual authors that the history has been handed down to us. A great society was formed by the apostles of Christ. It spread far and wide. The different branches of it held close communion with each other and had continual intercourse with each other, as we already perceive in the letters of Paul.

What was it that called into being this

religious society? What was the bond of union between its various branches? —A belief in a set of facts. In all it was the same belief that formed the standard round which the members rallied, that gave them common hopes and common principles of action. The account of facts that we find recorded by Paul in 60, that we find set forth at large in our four gospels, that we find recognised by the apostolic fathers from 90 to 120, is one and the same account. There is no hint of any other. No new or changed account could have been brought into that wide-spread society which owed its existence to its belief in the original story, and kept up its life only on the supposition that it was true.

What follows from these plain considerations? That the account we have in our gospels (certainly written in very early times, said in very early times to have been written by apostles or their companions) is at all events the story about Jesus Christ that circulated among Christians from the very first. I am not saying now that it is true. But such as it is, whether true or false, real or imaginary, it is the story which gave birth to the Christian Church. It is the story which forms the ground of its existence, which its converts have all received, which its teachers have all taught. The disciples of Christ after His death went out and proclaimed *something;* the people who heard them, and flocked to their company, believed something; the churches

which were rapidly formed in all lands held and taught something; the numerous martyrs who, according to heathen testimony, suffered in the principal cities of the empire, died for something. What was that something, so proclaimed and believed and cherished even unto death? It was the Gospel history of facts. We hear it through the ages echoed and re-echoed. Amidst all disputes and discussions and varying opinions, we hear the one old story incessantly repeated. Back as we pursue our search from generation to generation till the very first, we find unchanged that one narrative. I appeal to the most decided unbeliever who is acquainted with ancient literature whether I am not right thus far. I assume nothing, I conclude nothing, as

yet. I simply state recognised historical facts. We have the Gospel story from the time when Christ's companions were alive. We have it received by all Christian Churches ever since. We have no trace of any other story.

From these facts I now proceed to gather some very important conclusions.

First I conclude that Christianity is founded on a persuasion, from the time of its commencement, that Jesus lived a super-human life, and rose again from the dead,—that those who knew Him personally believed that He claimed supernatural power, believed that He exercised it continually, believed that He manifested it in a manner surpassing all their expectations by coming back alive from the grave.

Who first held this belief? who taught it? The men who had been influenced by Jesus, the men who had lived with Him, and seen and heard Him from day to day. No one else cared for Him at first. It was His own friends and companions who brought His name and His history before the world. There was not time (as you saw) for any development of an elaborate story to embody theologic views. A few years after the Man died on the cross, we have Churches in every part of the civilized world re-echoing the one definite declaration, "Christ is risen from the dead."

I conclude, secondly, that the account given from the first by the companions of Jesus must have been a true account. Hard as it is to believe in the occur-

rence of such stupendous events, it is harder still to disbelieve the evidence on which it is brought before us. The men who had been going in and out with Jesus for years declare that during these years He wrought miracle after miracle; and that, when finally executed by the Romans, He rose again from the grave and ascended into heaven. The men who tell us this are men whose teaching is not excited or fanatical, but most wise, grave, and practical, as well as most beautiful in its moral elevation. No touch of bigotry or wild enthusiasm is to be found in that extensive body of literature called the New Testament, which is at all events the immediate echo of their instructions.

But they promulgated the miraculous

story about Jesus. If it is not true, those who told it—told it so earnestly and positively—must either have been greatly deceived themselves or must have combined to deceive others. Deceived or deceivers—which do you think they were? which could they have been?

Perhaps you shrink from the alternative, and escape the difficulty by supposing that they were partly deceived, and partly deceivers, — that is, that on some points they were mistaken, and on some they exaggerated or invented. If so, you have really to face both difficulties—the difficulty of conceiving them victims of a delusion, and the difficulty of conceiving them voluntarily misleading others.

Let us take up each side of the alter-

native. Could the friends and companions of Christ have been mistaken?

It is easy to speak in a vague way of superstitious times and credulous people; but were the works attributed to Christ such as to admit of mistake? Men blind from birth cured in an instant,—thousands, arrayed rank after rank on the green grass, fed with a few loaves,—were not these, and such-like acts recorded in the gospels, too definite and tangible for sensible men to imagine they saw done when they had not?

Our Lord's own resurrection—could they have been mistaken about this? Rationalists who believe that the disciples were honest, yet who disbelieve their witness, suppose either that Christ was not really dead when taken down from the

cross, but only in a deep trance; or that they did not really see Him afterwards, but that in their sanguine affection they persuaded themselves that they had.

To the first supposition it is sufficient to say—If He was not dead then, He must have died afterwards; and whenever His death took place, there must have been, not delusion, but fraud, as the story of His resurrection was persevered in.

To the second we at once answer—If the disciples imagined they saw Jesus risen when He was really dead, where was His body? Was it still lying in the grave? Did a number of persons, at different times and in different places, declare that they saw Him, and spoke to

Him, and ate with Him; did the news spread like wildfire among His friends; did it give an impulse to the new sect that in a few weeks increased its numbers from dozens to thousands; and was the body of the dead man all the time lying cold in His grave? Would nothing have been needed for many years to come, in order to make the story of the foolish fanatics fall to pieces, but to roll away the stone and show the corrupting corpse? or was it stolen away and hidden, secretly buried in some unknown spot? If so, the friends who did this were not deceived. Hiding away the body, knowing its deadness, declaring that it had miraculously risen and been carried up to heaven, they must have been conscious impostors.

This brings us to the other side of our alternative.

The disciples who had lived with Jesus, the women who had followed Him and ministered to Him,—did they combine in a false story to deceive the world? Did they say He worked miracles when they knew He never had? Did they say He rose again from the dead when they knew He was lying in a secret grave? Is this conceivable? What possible motive could they have had? Enthusiasm for Jesus? Their enthusiasm was based on the idea of His supernatural power; if they knew He had none, where did the enthusiasm come from? Had they anything to gain from the triumph of their fraud? They record themselves that Christ told them "His kingdom was not of this world."

They were prepared to lose everything for Him here; and what were they to expect hereafter for the skilful propagation of a lie? All their prejudices were shocked by His teaching: their ambition was disappointed by the nature of His promises: whatever dreams they might have cherished of earthly greatness were dissipated by His death: no motive could have been left to devise and invent the resurrection of the corpse. And soon came a grim detector of imposition. Persecution, loss of caste, loss of property, torture, death,—who would endure these to persevere in a declaration which he knew to be false? Yet in the face of every species of opposition, the promulgators of Christianity insisted on spreading their story. Nothing could daunt them;

nothing could silence them; nothing could check them. Out into all lands, and among all kinds of people, they pushed their way, preaching in one breath holiness of life and this marvellous story about Jesus.

Is it not utterly inconceivable that the witnesses of the resurrection should have been deceivers—that they should have declared to be true either some things or many things which they knew to be false?

Only one explanation, then, can there be of the persistent propagation of this miraculous story from the first.

It is the same to which we were led by our previous studies—that as the grand moral effect of Christianity could not have had any adequate cause but a super-

human cause—that as the grand picture of Divine and human beauty in Christ Jesus could not have been an ideal invention or a gradual development,—could only have been a copy from the life,—so the unhesitating and unvarying witness of the first Christians to the grand history of Christ's miracles and Christ's resurrection could not have arisen either from mistake or fraud on the part of its narrators, but that Jesus has been in actual fact "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." In a word—the victories over evil won by Christ's Gospel, the tears wiped away in His name, the halo of heavenly beauty encircling His picture, the perseverance and heroism of His disciples, the blood of His martyrs,—all

combine in leading to one conclusion. And that is, that the story about Jesus we hold in our hands is a true story—that He is nothing less than our Saviour and our God.

# LECTURE V.

## The Great Message.

## LECTURE V.

### *THE GREAT MESSAGE.*

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."—2 Cor. v. 19.

LET us collect in our minds what we have seen together thus far.

We have seen, first, that Christ's life was not an isolated phenomenon that appeared, was wondered at, and left no trace behind, but the beginning of a train of great, holy, and marvellous consequences which we feel to this day.

Secondly, that the description of Christ Himself in the gospels is such that from

its nature it must have been taken from the life,—that there must have been an unique and noble Person to supply the ideas for the unique and noble picture.

Thirdly, that the kind of witness borne to the facts of Christ's history is such as to force us to recognise that those facts could not have been imagined, could not have been invented, but must have actually taken place.

Even thus far, however, I can conceive some of my hearers following me with a sort of assent, and yet hesitating to bow down before the Lord Jesus. A real Person, they acknowledge, He certainly was —great, good, and noble too. Something supernatural which they cannot understand they perceive to be interwoven with His history. He is to be admired; He is to

be reverenced; He is to be imitated. But they cannot see their way to anything more. I want to show you that the facts of the case carry with them much more.

Our text occurs in one of the earliest of the Christian writings that have come down to us. The interval between the time when it was written and the death of Christ is about the same as the interval between the present time and the siege of Sebastopol. To myself and to many among us, who have hardly passed middle age, the events of that war are as fresh as if they occurred yesterday. I can recall the very words of letters received from friends describing the battle of Alma and the charge of Balaclava. No halo of uncertain mist has yet had time to gather round the prominent actors in those

scenes. We remember all about them, literally, distinctly, and clearly. The grasp of our friends' hands when they left home, the faces of those who never returned, how vividly they come back now to our mental sight!

About the same time had elapsed when our text was written since Jesus had eaten His last supper with His disciples —since He had been nailed to the cross. And this is how Paul now describes His career: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Paul was an intimate friend of the apostles of Christ, and in frequent communication with them. He was a recognised teacher of the Christian Church. His thoughts about Jesus are not peculiar to himself, but the same in their substance that we

find in all the ancient Christian writings. The words of our text are but the gathering up of what he was continually teaching in many forms. We have here, then, the idea of the history of Jesus prevalent a few years after He had been put to death—that God was in Him reconciling the world unto Himself.

How did such an idea rise in men's minds? I answer, it was the idea taught by Jesus Himself. Whether true or false, it was the leading idea of His life. The expression of it was the *great message* He proclaimed to mankind.

The disciples and friends who went about declaring that God in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself, were not Romans or Greeks with low notions about God. To heathens, the addition of

one god more to their Olympus would have presented no serious difficulty. Though it would have been rather soon for admiration of a companion to have developed into hero-worship, yet the transformation of a man into a demigod would not have seemed to them "a thing incredible." Their difficulty would not have been to conceive the union of man and God, but to conceive the meaning of God at all.

But Peter, Paul, Matthew, James, and John, and all who first preached Christ, were very different in their habits of thought. They were strict Jews. They and their fathers for generations had been trained in the severest monotheism. There was to their minds an awful, infinite chasm between a man and God.

The writers of their nation would pause and wipe the pen before they put on the parchment the letters of the "incommunicable name." If there was a truth which all the history and literature of their country—all its triumphs and its sorrows—made them cherish with passionate and even fierce devotion, it was the unity of God. Jehovah was to the Jew enthroned in majesty mysterious and terrible beyond thought. He was a jealous God. He was, in the words of the writer of our text,—words which he perhaps borrowed from some of the Christian liturgies of the time,—"the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom

no man hath seen nor can see, to whom be honour and power everlasting."

It was men so trained, imbued with such ideas of God's inconceivable greatness, who declared that Jesus was "Emmanuel, God with us,"—that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Do you not feel that the reasons must have been very overpowering that made these men speak thus of Jesus? They saw Him every day among them, hungry and thirsty and weary; they saw Him bleeding and dying; and yet they proclaim Him as the One who "was in the beginning with God, and was God."

Whence could this revolution in their rooted habits of mind have proceeded? All they had thought and felt in their former life, as well as all they suffered

in their after life, made their new faith intensely difficult for them. What was the ground of it?

The supernatural power they conceived Jesus to have exercised? This had its effect, no doubt. His resurrection from the dead especially seems to have ripened rapidly the convictions about His Divinity that had been slowly growing before. But this would not have been enough. They believed that many of their own number were endowed with similar powers afterwards. They considered such powers to be credentials of their authority as messengers of the Most High. But God, to the most marvellously endowed, was still the infinitely superior King, "whose they were, and whom they served."

Seeing Christ work miracles, seeing Him rise from the dead, would teach them that "He came from God," but would not teach them that "He was God."

The teaching was from Christ Himself. The teaching is still to be seen in the gospels.

I am not taking the gospels now, you will remember, nor the echoes of them we have in the other books of the New Testament, as inspired. I leave that subject for our next lecture. I do not lay any stress on the accuracy of this or that expression or sentence. I take the gospels simply as what I have proved them to be in previous lectures—first, the account of our Lord's life and teaching on the whole that was prevalent among His contemporaries; secondly,

from the nature of the writings, not invented or gradually developed or idealized compositions, but authentic narratives of what was actually said and done.

On the face of these narratives we perceive continually a strange self-assertion on the part of Jesus. It is more distinctly manifested in the fourth gospel than in the others, but it is very marked in them all. Jesus was beautifully meek and lowly, gentle, patient; never seeming to think of His own comfort, pleasure, ease, or advantage: He was utterly self-renouncing and self-forgetting: and yet, paradoxical as it sounds, He was intensely self-asserting.

Take your pencil: read rapidly through the gospels, marking the passages in which Christ puts Himself forward as the

object of faith, love, devotion, obedience, loyalty, imitation: then go back, read all these passages together, comprehend them as much as possible in one view, and it will be borne upon you irresistibly that what the Lord Jesus teaches and preaches principally is *Himself.*

Those who are persecuted for His sake are blessed. Those who give a cup of cold water for His name's sake are to be rewarded. Those who confess Him before men are to be confessed before the angels of Heaven. Those who love father or mother more than Him are not worthy of Him. Those who lay down life for His sake are to find it. Those who come to Him are to have rest. Those who believe in Him are not to perish, but have everlasting life. He is the Light of the

world. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by Him. He is the Door. He is the true Vine. He lays down His life for the sheep. He gives His life a ransom for many. He is to be seen coming in the clouds of Heaven. Before Abraham was, He is. He and His Father are one.

Through our Lord's many and various lessons, this teaching about Himself runs like a thread of gold, binding them all together. He teaches humility like that of a little child: He teaches purity in thought and look as well as in act: He teaches patience, forbearance, self-restraint, self-denial: He teaches trust in God's providence, truthfulness, courage, contentment, hatred of hypocrisy, fear of nothing in the

universe but God. He teaches the greatness, justice, and kindness of the Father in Heaven, the boundlessness of eternity. But beneath all these lessons is the one deep undertone—"I am come that ye might have life." "Except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."

What is the explanation of this strong self-assertion, combined with such lowliness of spirit? Have we here a wild enthusiast—a weak, though well-meaning victim of self-delusion?

That grand strong life—that manly, temperate, calm teaching—that deep far-seeing wisdom which has reformed the world, puts such a supposition to shame.

Could it have been that Jesus did not really speak words like those which are recorded? How came they there, then, em-

bedded in every page of that story which we saw must be accepted as authentic? Who put in those shining sentences which are the grandeur and beauty, as well as the difficulty, of Christ's conversations? Do you not see that you cannot pull out this gorgeous woof without tearing the whole texture to pieces?

Could it be that He spoke the words, but did not mean by them as much as we suppose? What did He mean, then? what could He have meant? How could He have put Himself forward as the object of men's supreme devotion and confidence if He knew that He was only one among a number of teachers?

Could it be that He was mistaken about Himself? Where would be His wisdom and greatness if He were capable of

making such a radical, fundamental, tremendous mistake? We must give up our admiration of Jesus, we must cease to rave about the beauty of His character, if He thought He was King of Israel, Judge of the world, Giver of eternal life, when He was only a common carpenter's son.

Could it be that from ambition He laid claim to what He did not possess? The supposition gives us a thrill of horror. We can hardly pronounce it. Every act of His glorious life, every word that fell from those lips, full of grace and truth, makes us recoil from such an idea as not only false but blasphemous.

Whatever way we take the phenomena before us, if the idea embodied in our text is not true, we have an incomprehensible chaos.

That beautiful, lofty, yet lowly character reiterating expressions of unparalleled egotism ; that self-sacrificing life blended with personal claims beyond those of the maddest ambition : wisest, simplest, most noble teaching combined with wildest dreams of self-exaltation : men who shrank with horror from encroaching on the majesty of the "jealous God," bowing down in worship to their human companion : Nature's laws suspended, storms calmed with a word, sick men cured with a touch, the dead coming back to life at a human summons, the sky darkened, the rocks rent, the graves opened,—all only to sanction the teaching of one good man among many!

What a confused mass of improbabilities! Can you believe them? I cannot.

Take the explanation of our text, and the chaos ranges itself into the most beautiful order. The incarnate Lord emptying Himself of His glory, practising and preaching self-abasement, yet proclaiming His advent as a Helper and Deliverer: the God-fearing men who saw His works and heard His words forced to recognise the Divinity that dwelt in that lowly Form: the Creator, who ordained the laws of Nature, making lower laws yield to higher: He whose omnipotence appointed that nerve and muscle and bone and flesh, gathered together from earths and gases, should move obedient to human will, causing the material elements of the world to bend and sway at the bidding of His own will,—all here is harmonious.

This one hypothesis, that Jesus is the Divine Redeemer, explains the phenomena before us. The Christian creed accounts for the Christian facts. Nothing else does.

Here, then, is the message that Jesus proclaimed in His teaching, in His works, in His death, His resurrection, His ascension,—Himself as the Saviour, Himself as the manifestation of God, Himself as the atonement for sin.

This is the message. It has rung its music through the world ever since. It rings in my heart. Does it not ring in yours?

This message meets all the needs of humanity. Man wants God. He cannot do without Him. If he has Him not, he is lonely and lost amidst the mysteries and disappointments and puzzles

of life. As the plant stretches towards the light, as the babe gropes for the mother's breast, so man, ever since he has been in the world, has been feeling after God, if haply he might find Him. He is found here. Those questions we spoke of in our first lecture are answered in the Incarnation. God is made manifest in Christ. God as a Person, as One who has something in Him corresponding to our nature, something which gives a response to our feelings, as One who can be spoken to and can listen, who can love and be loved, as One who has feelings, will, purpose,—a real God, and not a blind Power,—all this is made known to us through the Divine Man. Could it be made known to us in any better or clearer way? How could the

attributes of Deity be revealed to us in a comprehensible and practically useful form so well as through the beautiful character and beautiful life of Jesus?

"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." It is just the sight we want. Holiness, justice, hatred of evil,—tenderness, pity, sympathy, pardoning love,—a Helper for every need,—Lord Jesus, when we read and understand Thy life, our hearts have found all that our hearts require and crave for in God.

And man wants a law of goodness. There is something within him that makes him feel the unalterable and eternal difference between right and wrong. He is puzzled to explain what makes the difference, why his feeling about it is so imperative. Jesus, who has been well

called "conscience incarnate," explains it. He shows righteousness as a personal relation between man and His Father. He reveals the Father's will as the great fact outside answering to the deep moral sense within.

And man wants a remedy for evil. He has a sense of guilt. It is not something manufactured by religion, but one of the painful realities of human history for which religions have striven to find a cure. There is an awfulness about the irrevocable past. The Nemesis whose halting but unerring step we hear behind us makes us feel that wrong-doing cannot be annihilated by weeping. How shall we escape? How shall we shake off the iron chain that hangs around us from our past sin, and be free to start with fresh hope

for the battle of the future? This is one of the deepest wants of our common nature, felt most when the soul is most awake to the realities of life. The want is supplied by the message of Jesus. God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself—the law by which the welfare of one is so continually procured by the sacrifice of another, working itself out to its culminating glory in the pardon of guilty men through the self-sacrifice of the innocent Jesus,—here is our Remedy. Here our penitence for sin finds consolation; our longings for reformation find a new starting-place. "By His stripes we are healed."

One craving more there is, without the satisfaction of which all human life is but as a broken and disappointing

dream. Man wants a future. His spiritual nature looks forward with straining gaze to a destiny beyond the grave. No philosophy can persuade him that his yearning for immortality is only the same kind of instinct as that which makes the young lions roar for their meat. Such explanation is felt to be intolerable.

A few troubled years of animal existence in a world where goodness meets such uncertain reward, where a brief joy of half-satisfied affection is followed so often by a long after-life of lonely mourning, where we have efforts so frequently unsuccessful, love unrequited, hope disappointed, labour useless, holiest desires unfulfilled, promising careers cut short—is this all? Are we never to have anything to look for beyond? Are the

pains of conscience, the cryings out of the heart for God, its longings for goodness and purity and nobleness,—are they only (as our modern teachers tell us) an animal apparatus of instincts to make this little bit of life in this little sphere a little more comfortable? Have the emotions of the human soul nothing in them different in kind from the opening or closing of the valves of a shell-fish?

The universal voice of humanity has ever cried out, We will not believe it. No matter what dismal array of proofs you bring us, we know we want, and must have, something more. We want a heaven. We want eternity.

He who brought life and immortality to light has satisfied this craving. Jesus meets this want. God in Christ tells His

poor child, hungering for immortality, that He will not send him empty away. The Gospel reveals a destiny for the human soul, boundless as the heavens, infinite as eternity. Christ's message tells of a home where the weary shall have rest, and the earnest shall have endless service, and the parted shall have reunion, and the lonely shall have love, and the sorrowful shall have comfort, and all shall be *satisfied*. The ambassador of the crucified and risen Jesus pronounces that, though the wages of sin is death, yet the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Such, then, is the message of Christ, and the creed of His Church. It is proved to us by external evidence, proved to us by internal evidence, proved by the

history of the world, by the testimony of martyrs, by the beauty of written narratives, by results seen and felt in the present, by correspondence to the deepest needs of our nature, by answers to the most eager questions of our spirits. So is the message proved. Is it not, must it not be true? Who will venture to reject it? Who will presume to say that it is only a human invention, or a human dream, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"?

# LECTURE VI.

## The Great Literature.

## LECTURE VI.

### *THE GREAT LITERATURE.*

"I have given them Thy word."—JOHN xvii. 14.

THUS far we have been considering the truth of the Christian story of facts. Our one great question has been—Did the things recorded in the gospels happen, or did they not? Our one answer, drawn from many sources, has been—They did happen. From the character of the story itself, from the way the witness to it was first borne and afterwards tested, from the great and permanent results that have accompanied it,

we have had the conviction forced upon us that the Gospel story is a story of real events.

In carrying out this argument, you have perceived that I made no claim to supernatural authority for any document. I pointed you to the general history of the world, to observed phenomena in the human heart and human life, to heathen authors who mentioned the persecution of Christians, to a succession of writers in the Christian Church who have left us books from a few years after Christ's death. I referred to all these topics as to data recognised by unbelievers as well as by believers.

In the train of writers we spoke of, I did not ask you to acknowledge any difference except that of priority or sub-

sequence in point of time. Going back in ancient history to trace the story about Christ, we treated Irenæus, Justin Martyr, Ignatius, Clement, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, exactly in the same way—merely as witnesses to what was taught and known about Jesus in the community that believed on Him. And looking on them simply in that way, we found in them all we needed for that part of our inquiry. We found the one story as to what Jesus did and said, substantially the same though told in various ways, held and taught from the beginning. And from these premises we were led to the conclusion that our Christian creed, as to Christ's teaching, Christ's work, Christ's nature, is a belief resting on firm foundation of fact.

I pause here for a moment. I speak now, not to confirmed believers, but to those who are perplexed by the difficulties I referred to in our first lecture. There are many things in the Bible that are stumbling-blocks to your faith. You find it hard to believe that it could have been given by inspiration of God, and yet contain so much that seems to you unscientific or untrue.

Supposing that all your objections are well-grounded,—supposing we have in that collection of ancient writings error mingled with truth: yet that supposition does not invalidate one word of the evidence I have brought before you.

The power for good exercised by Christianity has been in the world, is in the world, just the same. The beautiful pic-

ture of Jesus is not deprived of one touch of its loveliness: the witness borne by His companions to His miracles and resurrection, the blood shed by His martyrs, the sublimity of His message, the echo of His teaching answering from the depth of every human heart,—all this stands exactly the same whether your difficulties about the Scriptures are explicable or inexplicable. Jesus is a real Person, Jesus lived for you, Jesus died for you, Jesus is your risen and ascended Lord, whether you are right or wrong in your ideas of the Bible.

The Object of saving faith is not a Book, but a Person. The Book testifies to the Person, but it is the Person that saves.

I should however be doing you injustice, I should be doing the evidence of Chris-

tianity injustice, I should be doing our earnest, believing Christians injustice, if I left the subject thus. It is *possible* to believe in Christ without believing in a supernatural inspiration of Scripture, but it is in my judgment *illogical.* Such a position interferes with edification of life, and interferes also with consistency of thought.

If we have been led to see in Jesus a great and supernatural Person, it is hard to avoid seeing that He is the centre of a great and remarkable literature. One series of writers point forward to Him. From far-away ages in the past we find them witnessing for the one God, for the one pure morality, and preparing the way for the one coming Personage. Another series of writers look back upon Him. After His death, they start up, embody

His teaching, and embalm His memory. He Himself continually recognises and uses the authority of the first series: His ideas burn and glow on every page of the second. What are these writings?—Looking upon Christ as Divine, in what light are we logically led to look upon the Scriptures?

In considering this deeply important question, we cannot use any one or two expressions, or texts, as if they were final and decisive. That would be to assume the point at issue. We must thus far take the writings only as what we have thus far proved them to be—substantially reliable accounts of Christ's acts and conversation. The general tenor of His teaching we can be sure of: that we have the precise words that

He used, we cannot at this stage of our discussion take for granted.

Arguments based on what we think God would be likely to do, are also useless. It might seem very convenient to us that God should do this or that for our advantage; but that would not prove that *He* thought well to do it. I often read in popular books arguments for the inspiration of Scripture essentially the same as those used for the infallibility of the Pope. Could God have left us without an unerring guide? If every word of the Bible is not infallible, how are we to know which word is and which is not? If we have not a living voice to determine the meaning of the words, are we not still liable to error? All such reasonings, whether used on the

right side or the wrong side, are fallacious. We are no judges of what was the best thing for God to do. We can only judge the evidence of what He *has* done. Bad arguments of this kind only create prejudice and narrowness in believers; they never convince unbelievers.

But looking facts fairly in the face, what actual phenomena do we find in the literature we are considering, and what conclusion do those phenomena suggest to us?

I regret that time only now allows me to examine the second or New Testament series of writings; and prevents me from being able to show, as I had wished, the light thrown back by them on the Old Testament. But if I can help to establish your reverence to

the "Apostles," you are not likely to withhold it long from the "Prophets."

The literature that rose up after Christ's death, and that was the outcome of His teaching, is very various and voluminous. It has continued in a lengthening and expanding train to the present day. But certain writings of that literature we find placed in a very exceptional and peculiar position. They are first of all in point of time. They march at the head of the long procession. But they lead it as well as head it. The others follow, with more or less correctness, in their line of march. Their clear trumpet notes are caught up and re-echoed by the successive battalions.

These leaders are, I need not say, the documents that are collected together in the New Testament.

In comparing them with the writings that followed them, we are struck with their strange superiority both in matter and manner. Written by several different hands, by men who had breathed a very narrow literary atmosphere, there is about them all a moral elevation, a quiet, simple nobility of expression, which places them on a completely different platform from the literature of their age. Read any of the Christian books of the second or third century: then turn from their mingled wisdom and foolishness, their true statements and often unreasonable arguments—turn from them to the pages of the New Testament, and you will feel a contrast like that which you experience in a picture gallery when you turn to the pure conception of a

Raphael or a Guido from the raw and blundering copy of it by an inexperienced student.

I have said that these writings are in tone and style on quite a different platform from any writings of that age. Might I not without exaggeration go further, and say that they are far above anything that has been written in any age? Might I not say that all noble and beautiful thought ever since has been only the development of the germs they contain? This is a kind of argument more easily felt than expressed. We cannot put it down in black and white. If any one says that he does not feel it, that he does not perceive anything in the Scripture so wonderfully touching, tender, elevated, reaching down to the depths

of the conscience, we cannot refute him. If in our Lord's sermons, rebukes, warnings, and consolation, in Paul's description of Charity, or of the fruits of the Spirit, or song of triumph on the Resurrection, in Peter's letter to the strangers in heaviness for a season, in John's description of the New Jerusalem, —if he sees in these no beauty to be admired, no specially clear insight into the human heart, no accurate discernment of the essentials of holiness, we cannot prove he is wrong, in the same way as we can demonstrate an error in an algebraic calculation. It is hard to argue about tastes and feelings. We can only say that the general verdict of thoughtful men (even of those who do not believe in the supernatural) recognises in the

writings of the New Testament a moral grandeur and spiritual beauty unrivalled in their age, and unsurpassed in any age.

We find also that these writings, before whose spiritual majesty our hearts instinctively bow, have been, from as far back as we can trace the history of the Christian Church, looked upon in a very solemn light. As soon as the community of believers in Jesus came to its self-consciousness as an organised whole, it took the writings of the New Testament under its care and keeping as its most special treasure. Lists of these books were very soon made out. We have part of such a list (preserved in what is called the Muratorian Fragment) from so far back as about A.D. 170. Commentaries on them

were written, translations made, harmonies of the gospels put together, at periods so early that it is hard to fix their exact date. In the old Syriac version, which is read in Eastern Churches to this day, we have a translation which cannot have been made later than the end of the second century.

In all disputes of Christians one with another, these books (with a few exceptions) were the weapons of attack and defence. They were acknowledged by the disputants on every side as a common authority.

But more than this. They were quoted from very early times, not only as authoritative, but also as *divinely* authoritative. They were quoted as the teaching of the Spirit of God.

The opinions of early Christians, and

their views about the writings, are not indeed decisive with us. We no more bow to the *authority* of a Christian author in the second century than in the nineteenth. But the witness of these early believers is of enormous weight. The way each individual speaks shows us what were the ideas on the subject prevalent in the community. We receive the verdict of the early Church, not as the dictation of an infallible power, but as the testimony of a competent judge. Those Christians who lived while the echoes of Christ's voice had hardly yet died away, who were bound together by their belief in facts of His history remembered by their fathers, who struggled and bled for their common faith in Jesus as their Lord, evinced the deepest reverence for

our canonical books. They found in them strength and consolation amidst their sufferings. They constantly used them in their battle against error and superstition. They must have had some ground for treating them thus — some very strong ground for looking on them in such an exceptional way.

And it is not difficult to see what the ground was. They believed that these writings came from an *apostolic* source. Whether written by apostles or not, they believed they carried with them apostolic teaching. "The tradition of the apostles" was the expression used at the end of the second century to describe the authority of the sacred books. The Church of Rome makes a distinction between Scripture and tradition. With the early Church

they were identical. She accepted some books because they had the tradition—that which was handed down—by the apostles ; she rejected others because they had it not. Why were the gospels, for example, according to S. Mark and S. Luke received as inspired when they do not claim to have been written by apostles? The answer is given most concisely by Dean Alford : "Because they are regarded as authentic documents descending from the apostolic age, and presenting to us the substance of the apostolic testimony."

That our New Testament writings thus come to us as the teaching of the apostles is the testimony of the early Church ; its opinion is that the teaching of the apostles is inspired by the Holy Ghost. The testimony must be received as that of men who

had ample means of knowing what they witnessed: the opinion must be not servilely followed, but respectfully weighed.

But is not this opinion manifestly sound? The authentic narrative of facts describes to us that the Lord Jesus commissioned a certain set of men to teach in His name, and promised to endow them with His Spirit, to guide them into all truth, and to bring all things to their remembrance that He told them. Try to realise in your minds the awful grandeur of the Being who sent these men forth. The earth was honoured for a while with the visible presence of Him who is the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His Person. The great Ruler and Author of all dwelt among us. He came to reveal to us the truths for which our

hearts yearn and crave. He came to make known to us Himself. There, among the hills and lakes of Galilee, and the olive groves and grey-walled villages of Judæa, there shone for a while the glory of Him who is "the Light of the world."

Often in our darkness and perplexity, stumbling on "the world's wide altar stairs," our hearts cry out, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down!" He has come down. He has assured us of the reality of His existence, the reality of His love for us, the reality of all He has in prospect for us, by condescending to sojourn for a little while in our midst.

From the company who surrounded Him during those precious years, who

were honoured by daily looking into His face and hearing the sound of His voice, He deliberately appointed a few chosen ones. He breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," endowing them with an almost awful authority. It is their teaching we have in the New Testament. We want no exact definitions of the nature of inspiration. We have none except such as have been invented by theologians. We want no elaborate theories as to what inspiration does or does not effect—how far it reaches or does not reach—how the human and divine elements are blended. These theories only raise up difficulties, puzzle believers, drive away sceptics. We are satisfied (I am, certainly,) with knowing that in the writings in our hands we have the testi-

mony and the teaching of men whom Jesus loved, whom Jesus trusted, whom Jesus commissioned, whom Jesus inspired with the Holy Ghost the Comforter. He gave them His word. They have given it to us. That is enough for us to know. To quote again from Dean Alford : " The men were full of the Holy Ghost ; the books are the pouring out of that fulness through the men—the conservation of the treasure in earthen vessels. The treasure is ours in all its richness ; but it is ours as only it can be ours,—in the imperfections of human speech, in the limitations of human thought, in the variety incident first to individual character, and then to manifold transcription and the lapse of ages."

In conclusion, a word or two more to those whom I have had specially in

view during these lectures,—people perplexed by intellectual difficulties. What I have said does not *take away* your difficulties about the Scriptures. It was hardly meant to do so. But I trust it has shown you what reason you have to believe in spite of your difficulties. There are things in the gospels that seem to you not at all what you would expect in an inspired Book. That may alter your notion of what inspiration effects, but it does not alter the fact that the Book comes with the authority of Christ's apostles. May I ask you to take up the Book and read it again, with this feeling in your mind: "Here is the teaching of a messenger of my Saviour,—here is an echo of His own instructions." Oh, tried and and doubting brother, reading it in this

spirit, not to look for accuracies or inaccuracies, science or want of science, but to find out God's message to your heart and conscience, a new light will shine on the page—an evidence will be borne in upon you which will be stronger than any formal proof—the response deep within, 'These words meet my wants: my conscience tells me they are true: they convince me of my sin: they cheer me by the promise of pardon: they strengthen me in my desire for goodness: they open out to me plainly that which my heart has been guessing at dimly,—what my God is to me, what He wants me to be for Him.'

THE END.

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